

Social Dancing: Social Interactions Within the Dancing Community

Introduction

It is complicated to understand the concept of a discourse community even though people use it on a daily basis. The different ways people communicate amongst each other in different scenarios is what creates different discourse communities. In short terms, a discourse community is “a group of people who share ways to claim, organize, communicate, and evaluate meanings” (Schmidt and Vande Kopple, 1993). At times, it is easy to classify groups into separate discourse communities, however, “if certain groups accept the same kinds of evidence, they are probably parts of an overarching discourse community” (Schmidt and Vande, 1993). As an active member of the social dancing community, I was intrigued to analyze how a group of people who mainly communicate in a nonverbal way can be considered a discourse community.

First of all, social dancing is a physical activity where two people, a lead and a follow, dance together to different styles of music. Even though there is no verbal communication during social dancing, dancers still communicate through a certain language considered as a “movement dialect” that “involves a set of movements with shared, culturally agreed upon meanings” (Bosse, 2008, pp.47). This means that the lead has the responsibility of transmitting signals through the use of body movement while the follow is responsible for implementing these signals into the dance. It seems impossible to do something just through body movement but it is possible if both dancers have the correct frame and tension. A frame is a ‘toned and stable upper body with the torso stretched, the arms up and heads left. It is good posture’ (Closed Position Latin, 1997). A big part of having a steady frame is having the correct amount of tension which is mainly “our responsiveness to our partner” that “increases with more ‘tightness’ or tension in our frame – specifically our arms and shoulders” (Crewe, 2015).

There is more to social dancing other than just plain dancing. Verbal interactions do occur before and after social dancing events where people have the opportunity to build relationships and at the same time expand the social dancing community. People tend to do other activities such as go to the movies or

go out to eat before and after social dancing events. After being involved in the social dancing scene for over a year, I consider social dancing as a discourse community because they use communication outside of the dancing scene. Therefore, my main focus is to analyze the interactions in and out of the social dancing scene and demonstrate why it can be considered a discourse community.

Methods

I decided to interview Mariana who has been involved in the social dancing scene for a year, the same time I have spent social dancing too. Mariana is a second-year undergraduate majoring in Sociology at the University of California, Davis. I decided to interview Mariana because she and I are regulars at The Graduate, a social dancing venue near UC Davis. I believe that having a different perspective on the interactions in and out of the social dancing scene can help me analyze more in depth the ways in which social dancing is its own discourse community. I analyze Mariana's interview and also provide my personal observations in regards to the interview. The main purpose of the interview is to obtain primary feedback on the verbal interactions that occur in and outside of the social dancing community.

The interview consisted of the following open ended questions:

Results

Mariana	Personal Observations
Question 1: Why do you like social dancing? · I like dancing to this type of music because it's usually fun, upbeat, and because of the connection that you develop with the dancers. It also offers opportunities for people to show their own unique styling, making it fun to express your individuality.	Question 1: Why do you like social dancing? · I enjoy social dancing because it is a way to meet new people and create new relationships. In the social dancing scene, I constantly interact with other dancers and I am pushed to interact with in a verbal and nonverbal way.

<p>Question 2: How do you ask someone to dance?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · When I ask someone to dance, I often extend my hand towards my direction, and I ask them if they would like to dance this song with me. 	<p>Question 2: How do you ask someone to dance?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · When I ask someone to dance I tend to politely extend my hands towards their direction and verbally ask them if they want to dance with me. I always make sure to smile and respectful at all times.
<p>Question 3: What do you do if someone rejects dancing with you?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · When someone rejects dancing with me, I just thank them and tell them not to worry about it, smile and leave. I continue being friendly just for them to be sure that it's everything is ok. 	<p>Question 3: What do you do if someone rejects dancing with you?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · When someone rejects dancing with me, I always let them know that it is totally okay. Most dancers feel pressured to say yes but saying no is also acceptable in the dancing scene. This could be due to many reasons such as they are tired or they do not feel comfortable dancing to a certain type of music.
<p>Question 4: Question How does the dancing community work?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · I think the relationships formed in the social community starts with two people dancing multiple times. If you dance regularly with the same dancer, the physical connection while dancing increases, and you become more comfortable. This often leads to the dancers eventually talking with one another; first with what they like about the dancing scene, and with time, having more personal talks. The more this talks continue within the dancing scene or outside, the more likely or stronger the friendship will be created. 	<p>Question 4: Question How does the dancing community work?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · The dancing community is a safe space that is made of by strong relationships. When someone is new to the dancing scene, there are dancers who are happy to teach them the basics or new tricks. They help each other improve by giving each other constructive advice. When I first started working, I introduced myself to great dancers who help me improve at a really fast pace. After dancing with the same people for a long time, I have reached a new level of friendship. We all share a passion and admire each other for wishing to improve as dancers.

Both Mariana and I are UC Davis undergraduates and are also regulars at The Graduate, a social dancing venue. Since both of us go to The Graduate at least once a week, we have established relationships with students from Sacramento State University who are also regulars. After dancing with the same group of people over a year, we have established strong relationships with social dancers from Sacramento State. The more interactions we have with one another, the more we are open to organizing activities outside of the social dancing scene creating a non-verbal social dancing activity into a discourse community.

Based on the responses from Mariana, I have concluded that social dancing is a discourse community. Mariana and I have made similar observations in the way people interact inside and outside of the social dancing scene. Inside the social dancing community, people respect each other as dancers since they all share an interest. This is noticeable when dancers politely ask someone to dance. When Mariana asks someone to dance she explains that she “often extend my hand” and “ask them if they would like to dance” (personal interview, May 21, 2017). In some occasion, if one is very close to the person that is being asked to dance, nonverbal communication such as extending their hands is only required.

If for any reason Mariana gets rejected she kindly “thanks them and tell them not to worry about it” then she “smiles and leaves” (personal interview, May 21, 2017). From my own personal observations, I tend to do the same thing, always handling my actions with respect. When asking someone to dance, I politely extend my hand toward the other person and wait for their approval. If people reject my offer, I politely smile and walk away. Asking someone to dance and rejecting someone in a proper manner are one of the first things that instructors teach to new social dancers. This is because it will make our “partners feel supported and at ease” which will lead to more enjoyable dancing experiences (Crewe, 2015). One of the most important factors about social dancing is to be respectful towards one another nonverbally and verbally. If dancers feel uncomfortable dancing with their partners, they are encouraged to thank their partners for the dance and walk away. This will let the other dancer know that whatever they were doing was not done properly or was inappropriate. Even though social dancing is nonverbal, it

is important to verbally express each other's thoughts so that the social dancing community keeps growing as a safe space for social dancers from all levels.

Therefore, the fact that people give meaning to counts and how these counts are then transformed into a "movement dialect" by social dancers is in fact a characteristic of a discourse community (Bosse, 2008). In terms of socializing, I agree with Mariana in that people in the social dancing scene connect first through dancing and then seek opportunities outside of the social dancing scene to build onto their relationships. Also, it is noticeable how people interact with one another in the same way people interact in different discourse communities. People who are involved in the social dancing scene like the same music, same artists, same dancers, and also gather in similar places. For example, a conversation with social dancers involves talking about workshops and festivals they attended, famous social dancers they met, popular dancing venues, best dancing experiences, and dancing shoes. Through these types of conversations, social dancers give each other tips on ways to improve and create a better environment for future social dancers.

Conclusion

After analyzing the social dancing scene, I have concluded that the social dancing community is considered a discourse community because communicate beyond the dance venue. For my primary research, I interviewed one social dancer who has been part of the social dancing community for over a year. The responses I received in terms of how people behaved in and outside of the social dancing scene supported my conclusion that the social dancing community can be considered a discourse community. However, social dancers also communicate verbally using a different language that can be seen through the use of counts and special use of other vocabulary. The main goal of the social dancing community is to create a safe space for all dancers of all ages. Social dancing is not only about being part of an activity that requires skill but it has become a great way to socialize and meet new people who share a similar passion. Some members of this community use social dancing as a way to cope with anxiety or stress while others wish to gain higher levels of skill to become better dancers. However, the main goal of social dancing is to have fun and to enjoy the moment.

Appendix

Name of step	Description
Latin dancing	The partner dances originating from the Caribbean: mambo, rumba, merengue, etc.
Following	The ability of the follower to react correctly to the signals given by the leader through physical and visual connections. The act of moving a fraction of a second later than the leader, and yet still be on time.
Leading	Effective communication of intended actions by the leader through the use of leader's own body movements and through one or more physical or visual connections to the follower

Frame	Posture, body position, and arm position for the purpose of maintaining connection
-------	--

(Basic Dance Vocabulary, 2002).

References

Basic Dance Vocabulary. (2002). USA Dance, Inc.

Retrieved from <http://usadance.org/college/forms-and-resources/>

Bosse Joanna. (2008). *Salsa Dance and the Transformation of Style: An Ethnographic Study of Movement and Meaning in a Cross-Cultural Context*. Vol. 40 Issue 1. Pp. 45-64.

Retrieved from

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/FDE587B0311AA3F135B78F47C006AC7B/S0149767700001364a.pdf/div-class-title-salsa-dance-and-the-transformation-of-style-an-ethnographic-study-of-movement-and-meaning-in-a-cross-cultural-context-div.pdf>

Closed Position (Latin). (1997). BallroomDancers.

Retrieved from http://www.ballroomdancers.com/learning_center/Dance_Positions/info.asp?pos=cpl

Crewe Ian. (2015). *Dance Partner Tricks for Connecting*. Social Ballroom. Dance.

Retrieved from

<http://socialballroom.dance/dance-partner-tricks-for-connecting>

Johnson Tom. (1999). *What does 8 Count Mean in Dancing?* eHow.

Retrieved from

http://www.ehow.com/facts_7194768_8-count-mean-dancing_.html

Schmidt, G. and Vande Kopple, W. (1993). *Communities of Discourse: The Rhetoric of Disciplines [excerpt]*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice – Hall